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A
LETTER,
COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL,

ADDRESSED TO

THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT.

6. 11. 1791

LETTER

COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL

OF

THE KNIGHT, LORD, AND BISHOP

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COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL,
ADDRESSED TO
THE RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT,
IN WHICH
THE REAL INTERESTS OF BRITAIN
IN THE
PRESENT CRISIS
ARE CONSIDERED,
AND
SOME OBSERVATIONS ARE OFFERED
ON THE
GENERAL STATE OF
EUROPE.

By JASPER WILSON, Esq.

WHO HATH TAKEN THIS COUNCIL AGAINST TYRE THE CROWN-
ING CITY, WHOSE MERCHANTS ARE PRINCES, WHOSE TRA-
FICKERS ARE THE HONOURABLE OF THE EARTH.

ISAIAH.

DUBLIN:
PRINTED FOR P. BYRNE, GRAFTON-STREET;
AND J. MOORE, COLLEGE-GREEN.

1793.

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ON THE

GENERAL STATE OF

EUROPE

BY JAMES WILSON

WHO HAS TAKEN THIS SUBJECT UNDER THE EYE
AND GIVE THOSE MEMBERS ALL THE MOST REASON-
ABLE AND THE MOST USEFUL OF THE FACTS.

LONDON: PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, 1793.

WILLIAM PITT

PRINTED FOR T. BARNES, GREAT OXFORD STREET;

AND J. MOORE, COLLIER STREET.



L E T T E R, &c.

S I R,

AN inquiry into the causes of the general calamities which affect the commercial and manufacturing interests, and the connexion which these may have with the measures of government, is properly addressed to you as the Minister of the Crown, and the leader of the House of Commons.

A concurrence of fortune and talents has raised you to a degree of consequence in the public eye which no other individual of the age has attained, and your friends having ascribed to you much of our late unexampled prosperity, your enemies will doubtless impute to you our present unparalleled distress. Party zeal may blind the one and the other; but the subject of the present inquiry must in every point of view press with peculiar force on your mind.

The writer of this was one of the warmest of your admirers. The progress of time and of events has cooled his enthusiasm respecting you, but has not, as is often the case, turned it into hostility. Neither disposed to offend or flatter, he would deliver his sentiments with the deference due to your ex-

traordinary talents, but with the earnestness and solemnity suited to the present crisis of human affairs.

That the calamities which affect our commerce and manufactures are great beyond example, it is unnecessary to prove. The unprecedented and alarming measures which are resorted to in parliament to prevent the universal wreck of credit, put this beyond a doubt. It does not however seem to be generally observed that these calamities are not peculiar to Britain. Bankruptcies have spread and are spreading every where over the continent of Europe, through France, Holland, Germany, Poland, and Russia, and every where private as well as public credit is impaired or destroyed. If the injury to commerce and manufactures is more felt in Britain than elsewhere, it is because we have had more commerce and manufactures to be injured. And this reason which explains why Britain suffers apparently more than the other kingdoms of Europe, will also explain why the different towns and counties of Britain suffer at present exactly in proportion to their former commercial prosperity. In one respect England differs at present from most of the other European Nations—our public credit is yet tolerably sound. But the governments of Russia, Austria, Poland, and France, are either bankrupt, or on the verge of bankruptcy, and have had recourse to practices that differ little from open rapine.

I state these facts on authorities to some of which I shall allude as I go on, but I believe that you will admit them at once as unquestionable.

To seek for the origin of such general calamities within the precincts of a single kingdom, is to labour to no purpose. They are to be traced, as it appears, to the prevalence and extension of the war-system throughout Europe, supported as it has been by the universal adoption of the funding-system. As this idea has not been laid before the public, and as per-
haps

haps it may not have presented itself fully even to your mind; as moreover it seems to be of the utmost importance; I must beg leave to unfold it at some length, and to shew its application to our own distresses.

Speculative men, Sir, in the retirement of their closets have delighted to contemplate the progress of knowledge, and to shew its happy effects on the condition of our species. The truth seems to be as was asserted by Lord Bacon, "that knowledge is power," or to speak more popularly, that power is increased in proportion to knowledge. But the effects of power on human happiness depend on the wisdom and benevolence by which it is directed, and where these are not found in a corresponding degree, an increase of power must often add to the miseries of the human race. Without however disputing the happy influences of the progress of knowledge on the whole, it may be doubted whether these have extended in any considerable degree to the general political system, and it may be clearly shewn, that its effects on the intercourse of nations with each other, have been hitherto in many respects injurious.

Among savages the means of intercourse are restricted to tribes who are neighbours, and hostilities confined in the same manner. As Knowledge increases the means of intercourse extend, and nations not in immediate vicinity, learn to mingle in each others affairs. The history of European nations proves this, among whom treaties offensive and defensive have been constantly extending and multiplying for the two last centuries, as their intercourse has increased, and, wars, without becoming less frequent, have become far more general, bloody, and expensive. The balance of power, a notion springing up among statesmen towards the end of the 15th century, has been a principal cause both of the frequency and the extensiveness of modern wars; the religious

religious distinctions which divided Europe after the period of the reformation, have also been the cause or the pretext of frequent hostilities; and the supposed dignity of crowns, an expression the more dangerous from the obscurity of its meaning, has been constantly enumerated among the reasons for nations unsheathing the avenging sword.

Wars thus originating in causes peculiar to a semi-barbarous state of society, have been extended in other respects by the progress of knowledge and its effect on the arts. To this we are to attribute many of the improvements in the science of destruction, and in the science of finance: to this especially we are to attribute the *funding-system*, which at once multiplied the means of warfare twenty-fold, and which after anticipating and exhausting the public revenue in almost every nation of Europe, seems at length to approach the point so clearly foretold, when it must produce a system of general peace, or of universal desolation.

As this idea is very important, suffer me to illustrate it fully—

The Italian Republics, according to Dr. Smith, first invented funding—from them it passed to Spain, and from the Spaniards to the rest of the European nations. The practice of funding commenced in England with our national debt during the war which terminated in the peace at Ryswick in the year 1697 and it has been the means by which this debt has accumulated to its present enormous amount. The system itself is precisely the same as to government, that mortgaging the revenue of an estate to raise a present sum of money, is to the individual. The income mortgaged by the individual arises perhaps from land, that of the estate from one or more taxes, and both in the one case and in the other, this mortgage is for the payment of the interest of the sum borrowed. The individual generally engages to re-

pay

pay the principal when demanded, the state never does this, but while the interest is regularly discharged, and the country is tolerably prosperous, the security given by the state being transferable, finds a ready market, and thus the absorption of the capital, as far as respects the creditor of the state, is in a great measure remedied.

The convenience of the funding-system to those who administer the governments of Europe is obvious. It enables them on the commencement of wars to multiply their resources for the moment, perhaps twenty-fold. Previous to this invention, a tax raising five hundred thousand pounds annually, would strengthen the hands of government by this sum only, but under the funding system, the tax being mortgaged for ever for as much money as it would pay the annual interest of, brought into the treasury the capital sum at once, that is ten or perhaps twelve millions. It is true this spendthrift expenditure must bring a day of reckoning—But what then? Those who administer the public revenue, are not owners of the estate, but in general tenants at will, or at most, having a life interest in it only. The practice of mortgaging the public revenue during wars, prevents the people from feeling the immediate pressure of the expense, by transferring it in a great measure to posterity. Ministers look to the moment, and delight in expedients that may delay the evil day.—When it comes, it does not in all probability fall on those with whom the mischief originated. They are no longer in power; they are perhaps in their graves, and deaf to the wrongs of their injured country.

It is however but candid to acknowledge that we have seen you acting on a nobler system; incurring the odium of proposing new taxes to discharge the interest of debts contracted in support of measures which you had uniformly opposed, and teaching an almost exhausted people to bear
still

still heavier burthens, rather than sacrifice their future good, or violate the eternal obligations of justice!—Then was your day of triumph.

Half-informed men have sometimes contended that the national debt is a national good. To enter at large into their arguments is foreign to my purpose, since this possession depends on sophisms that have been often detected. It may indeed be admitted that some accidental advantages have arisen from the transferable and marketable nature of the securities given to the public creditors. In times of commercial prosperity these have promoted circulation, and acted in some degree like a quantity of well-secured paper money. But this effect, besides that it is contingent and uncertain, in no respect compensates for the evils arising from the pressure of taxes, the increased rate of wages, and the withdrawing of an immense capital from productive to unproductive labour. †

Without embarrassing ourselves with complex ideas, it may be at once asserted, that a government which goes on borrowing and mortgaging without redeeming its funds, must at length like an individual, become bankrupt, and that the ruin this produces will correspond to the magnitude of the bankruptcy. This has been all along clearly foreseen by those who have examined the subject, but the predictions of some enlightened men, as to the sum of debt under which the nation must become bankrupt, having turned out fallacious, ignorant persons have supposed that the principle on which these predictions were founded was in itself false. But when Mr. Hume predicted that a debt of a hundred millions would bring on a national bankruptcy, he erred in his calculation

† See the Wealth of Nations.

only from not foreseeing the influence of the progress of knowledge on the useful arts, and the increased sources of revenue which would thus be opened. The surprising advances of chemistry, and the effects of its application to manufactures; the wonderful combinations of chemistry and mechanics, for the reduction of labour—these are the happy inventions, by which bankruptcy has been hitherto averted. The security of property and the spirit of liberty diffused through the nation, have called forth the talents of our people. Britain has grown prosperous in spite of the wretched politics of her rulers.—The genius of Watt, Wedgewood, and Arkwright, has counteracted the expense and folly of the American war.

Are we to go on for ever in this extraordinary career? * It is impossible! The sources through which we have been enabled to sustain our enormous burthens are in a great measure dried up, our burthens themselves are increasing, and the whole fabric of our prosperity totters to its base!

Our prosperity depends on commerce; commerce requires peace, and all the world is at war—this is the short and the melancholy history of our situation. The shock is felt in England more than elsewhere, because, as was said before, England is more commercial than any other nation, but it pervades more or less the continent of Europe, from St. Petersburg to Leghorn: the history of commerce records no calamity so severe and so extensive. Of the houses that remain

* I might have answered this question in the words of Mr. Chalmers, in his "Comparative Estimate," where he very justly decides, that we can go on incurring debt and fresh taxes, only while commerce and manufactures increase in a corresponding degree. This masterly work will throw much light on our present situation; Lord Hawkesbury will do well to peruse it once more.

remain solvent, it is known, that the greater part are struggling with difficulties; that these are hourly increasing; and that distrust and dismay prevail universally. In Britain, as I shall have occasion to shew, our mercantile distresses are aggravated by the imprudent confidence arising out of extraordinary prosperity, which produced a very general over-trading of capital, and in some places a spirit of very unjustifiable speculation; but on the continent, where bankruptcy and distress began first, the imprudence of the mercantile system seems to have had little share in the failures, which may be traced almost entirely to the war politics of the ruling powers, and the dreadful practices by which these have been supported.

Whoever examines the history of the military establishments of the different European nations, will find that they have been for more than two hundred years, almost every where regularly increasing. The means of supporting this increase may have been found, in part, in the gradual augmentation of opulence and population, which perhaps has taken place pretty generally, in spite of the burthen of these establishments.—But the very great and sudden increase of the armies brought into the field in the latter end of the last, and the beginning of the present century, is clearly to be attributed to the funding-system, already explained, which about this time became almost universal. From this period the standing forces of Europe during peace have been gradually and regularly augmenting as before, and each successive war, has produced more numerous and better appointed armies than that which preceded.—The forces employed, the expense incurred, and the destruction produced in the war which terminated in the peace of 1763, far exceeded

ceeded whatever was before known in the annals of history. Satiated and exhausted with slaughter, the nations of Christendom sunk down into a short-lived repose. This was soon disturbed by the Empress of Russia, whose reign has involved her subjects in perpetual distresses, her neighbours in constant alarms, and has filled the eastern parts of Europe with repeated carnage. § In the west, the torch of war was rekindled by England, and a conflict with her own colonies aided by France, more fruitless, fierce, and bloody, than the war of 1756, dismembered her empire, added a hundred millions to her debt, and six millions annually to her standing taxes. ‡

During these operations in the east and west, the centre of Europe was agitated by the restless and pragmatic temper of the Emperor Joseph. This unwise and unfortunate, but not ill-intentioned prince, was happily controlled by the talents of the great Frederick, who for the last twenty years of his life cultivated the arts of peace, and on several occasions stifled the flames of a general war. The example of the King
of

§ This singular woman affects to be a patroness of learning, and is not destitute of what are called the princely virtues. She has had a kind of humour of sending her picture in gold snuff-boxes to literary men in different parts of Europe. Zimmerman has openly praised her, and Robertson has insinuated her praise. Impartial history will record the steps by which the *wise of Peter III. ascended his throne*; it will tell of 30,000 Turks massacred in cold blood at Ismeal; it will describe the first and the second division of Poland; and the bold annalist of better times may record this "august patroness of letters" as the scourge of the human race.

‡ By the first of these wars we conquered America, by the second we lost it, and thus a balance was struck; but two hundred millions of debt was incurred, and five hundred thousand lives sacrificed!—"What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hastened by."

of Prussia, however, and the mutual jealousy of the continental powers increased the armies of the continent wonderfully, and during his reign the peace establishment of Germany, a country containing less than eighteen millions of people, rose to five or six hundred thousand soldiers! By his superior policy the King of Prussia indeed contrived to render his army comparatively little burthenfome to his subjects, and died with his treasury full. || But Austria, and all the inferior powers of Germany have been long very poor. The wants of Joseph were great, those of Leopold greater, and those of the present Emperor are extreme—Russia is absolutely bankrupt, and the whole body of the peasantry reduced to the most wretched poverty. Spain languishes under an immense load of debt, and the same may be said of Holland, Portugal, and as I am informed, of the northern powers—The situation of France needs not to be described.

It ought however to make a deep impression on those at the head of nations, that the direct cause of all the troubles in France, was the lavish expenditure of its old government. The war of 1756, and that undertaken for the Americans, brought the funding-system there to its crisis, § the

|| His successor, it is generally understood, has nearly, if not entirely dissipated his treasures.

§ It is the fate of all despotic governments to be placed in general in the hands of fools, and where folly commands, it is ignorance alone that can be obedient. Nothing ever was so palpably absurd as the principles on which France mingled in the American war. She wished to weaken England, and threw her force into the American scale. We had got into a contest which must have been long, expensive, and finally unsuccessful, even had the absolute conquest of the colonies crowned the first years of the war. We were likely, from our pride and prejudices, to persevere to the uttermost, and national bankruptcy could

the revenue was more than anticipated by the interest of debts and the expence of the government; fresh taxes could not be collected; the people called loudly for a redress of grievances; the court gave way; popular assemblies were summoned; and succeeded each other in rapid

could only have arrested our career. France might have looked on in security, taken the opportunity of the calm to have arranged her finances, reformed her abuses, and strengthened herself by the arts of peace. She might have risen on our ruins, the empress of the sea, and the arbitress of Europe.—She openly interfered—the disease which seemed lingering and mortal, suddenly became violent; a crisis took place; we threw off the colonies, acknowledged their independence, and reassuming the arts of peace, became in a few years more prosperous than before. In the mean time France had received a mortal wound; *to prevent the war from becoming unpopular under the existing burthens*, she had carried it on without new taxes, by borrowing only. When peace came, this new debt was to be provided for—the people were poor, discontented, and what was worst of all, they were in some degree enlightened—the rest is known.

The policy of the powers which are combined against France, is of the same weak and foolish kind. The folly and the crimes of France rendered a civil war inevitable, and Europe might have looked on in safety and peace. This mighty people, weakened by intestine divisions, would have been no longer formidable; and the process of their bloody experiments on government, if left to itself, would have been fruitful of lessons of the most important kind. The neighbouring monarchs met at Pillnitz, and agreed to invade France, the first *convenient opportunity*. The treaty was discovered; it gave victory to the republicans without a contest; a civil war was prevented; and the banner of Jacobinism reigned triumphant. The allied powers have carried their treaty into effect; but being burthened with debt already, and the state of the public mind *requiring to be particularly consulted at present*, they are, like France of old, carrying it on by borrowing without laying on taxes, leaving this for the season of peace. The Emperor I am told gives nine per cent. for money, to prevent the imposition of taxes, and yet it is said that the unreasonable people of Vienna are not satisfied.

So far the policy of the powers now allied against France, and that of France herself in the American war, are precisely similar—How far the effects may correspond is in the womb of time.

succession;

succession; the current of opinion set stronger every day against every thing established. The populace found their strength; numbers, instead of wisdom, began to govern; the practice of change begot a habit of changing, and property and principles were swept away.

Happily for England, by great and virtuous exertions, she escaped in the year 1783, the bankruptcies which France incurred. The effects of continued peace on a nation such as ours, are beyond calculation. National confidence and credit being restored, our manufactures spread over the continents of the old and the new world, and our revenue rose on *the basis of circulation* to its late unexampled height. A paper currency of promissory notes and of bills of exchange, was a necessary consequence, and this which ought to have represented specie or merchandize only, became in a season of singular prosperity, the representation of almost every kind of property fixed and unfixed.

In the mean time affairs on the continent assumed a hostile aspect. The allied powers began to arm; France armed also. Armaments in countries comparatively speaking little commercial, required specie. It probably flowed freely from England, for a paper circulation supplied its place. These armaments rendered the people, as well as the governments poor, by diminishing and oppressing productive labour, absorbing the wealth that should have been employed in private industry, and obstructing commercial intercourse. Hence our customers did not purchase, or did not pay for our manufactures, and they began to remain on our hands.

Certain circumstances however prevented for a time our feeling the full effect of the war politics on the continent. In the first place we were at peace, and had declared for a peace-system, while the rest of Europe was agitated, and under arms. Hence
our

our funds became a favorite object of purchase for those monied men on the continent who wished to secure their property; immense sums, it is said, flowed in from France and the low countries, and the prices of stocks rose for a time, with the decline of our export of manufactures, and the efflux, as it should seem, of the precious metals.

Another circumstance operated in our favour. The war on the continent increased the demand for particular manufactures, from Germany, and more especially from France—Birmingham felt this, so did Yorkshire. Burning for combat, the *Sans Culottes* rushed into the field, and arms! arms and cloathing! was echoed from Picardy to Provence. These demands could only be supplied by England. France had ruined her credit by her second revolution; she must come to market with specie; and her gold and silver might have rested with us.—Our true policy was clear.

By this time however the sympathies of the different parties in England were excited to such a degree by the state of things on the continent, that the dictates of sound reason could no longer be heard; and the wickedness of the ruling party in France, having perpetrated one deliberate and dreadful murder, calculated to awake the horror of men in an extraordinary degree, the original friends of the revolution became mute; the once sacred name of liberty itself became offensive; the alarmist rose suddenly in numbers and force; clamours and indignation sprung up in every quarter; and amidst a wild uproar of false terrors, and of virtuous sympathy, the nation was plunged headlong into this dreadful war!

One powerful voice indeed, was heard above the storm, but the accents of reason and truth sounded like treason to an irritated people, and our rulers joined in the general outcry; the friends

friends of peace incurred the foulest calumnies of the day, but secured to themselves the purest admiration when passion and prejudice shall be dead.

War came; and fast on its heels a dreadful train of evils—bankruptcy followed bankruptcy in rapid succession, our resources seemed to vanish, distrust and terror seized the mercantile world, and the Bank of England itself partook, as it is reported, of the general alarm. In the mean time you are said to have declared in your place, that these evils had no connexion with the war, and Mr. Dundas assured us that they arose from our extraordinary prosperity. Similar language is held by the partizans of administration every where, and it is fit that this dreadful error should be publicly unveiled.

In a season of general peace and great prosperity, private as well as public credit had arisen to an extraordinary height, and from causes very obvious, but which it would be tedious to enumerate, paper-money became in a great measure the medium of circulation. This paper consisted of two kinds; of bills of exchange payable at different dates, and generally discountable; and of promissory notes, issued by the Bank of England and private Banking-houses, payable in specie on demand. The credit of each of these depended on their representing a property real and secure. The promissory notes were indeed supposed to represent specie at all times ready on demand, but in reality rested for their credit on the basis of some fixed property within the kingdom, and frequently on landed estates; the bills of exchange depended for their circulation on the joint credit of the drawer and the acceptor, and represented in a great measure property out of the kingdom; perhaps on the seas, in the West Indies,

*N. B. em.**Nota Bene*

Indies, on the coast of Africa, in America, or on the continent of Europe.† By means of this medium a vast quantity of fixed property was brought as it were into a state of activity, the paper money in circulation, every kind included, amounting as I have been told, to a sum that seems almost incredible!‡ The effects of a war on a paper medium such as I have described, may be easily imagined.—It must diminish the security of all property on the seas, in our islands, on the coast of Africa, &c. and of course destroy or impair the credit of all bills of exchange running on the validity of such property. If the property itself during a war would not easily find a purchaser, neither would a bill resting on that property. The property itself however might still be saleable, though at a diminished value, but this would not be the case with a bill of exchange, which, if it does not pass for the sum it is drawn for, will pass for nothing, and is thrown out of circulation. The manner in which this distressed our West-India houses is well known. The degree of hazard of our islands was perhaps over-rated, a circumstance arising from the peculiar nature of the war, and the fears under which we laboured and still labour of the desperate methods to which the French may have recourse. Previous to the war in England bankruptcies had begun on the continent, and the security of bills of foreign exchange began to be impaired. The invasion of Holland by Dumourier, one of the first consequences of the war, was a blow aimed at the credit of all Europe; our houses

† This subject is very finely and perspicuously explained at some length in a pamphlet entitled "Thoughts on the Causes of the present Failures," published by Johnson.

‡ Two hundred millions.

concerned in Dutch and other foreign exchanges found their security particularly shook; many of them are supposed to have tottered, and several fell. A similar effect took place in various parts of the continent, and the action and reaction of ruin spread far and wide. The invasion and partition of Poland contributed much to this general calamity. The Bank of Warsaw, the deposit of all the surplus wealth of the landed interest of Poland, was oppressed and destroyed by the royal plunderers; it failed for ten millions sterling, and brought down with it various houses throughout Europe, particularly in Petersburg, Hamburg, and Amsterdam. §

The war deprived our manufactures of the French market, of all others the most extensive, and as it had been conducted for a twelvemonth past, by far the most safe and lucrative. The general wreck of credit among our allies on the continent, deprived us in a great measure of the markets there. Orders did not arrive, or if they did arrive, could not be executed, the security of the correspondent was doubted, or the channel of payment shut up. It was soon therefore found, that our manufactures for the foreign markets had not sustained a temporary check, such as arises from over-trading every sixth or seventh year of peace, but an absolute stagnation; the bills and paper running on the security of the capital vested in machinery (an enormous and lately most productive property) were of course shook in their credit, and in the course of a few weeks, if a prospect of peace does not open, will be of all others the most insecure. If it were proper, on such an occasion to bring forward names,

§ Fifteen houses in Petersburg concerned in the trade to China, failed together.

each

each of these assertions might be supported and illustrated by abundant proofs.

The general result of these particulars, is that whereas before the war, bills were discountable, and of course entered into circulation from every part of the world, at perhaps eighteen months date, and sometimes at even longer, distrust and bankruptcy have rendered three fourths of the whole, for the present, waste paper; and those of the very first credit are in general negotiable at two months date only. The immense chasm that this must make in circulation may be easily imagined.

This general distress in the commercial and manufacturing interests, must of course occasion a great press on the monied men. What is their situation? Their property is generally vested in public securities; these must be sold out to meet the exigencies at a loss of from 20 to 25 per cent. Public securities have already sunk in value in consequence of the war to the amount of nearly fifty millions sterling, a sum almost equal to the whole of our national debt at the commencement of the war of 1755!

Land has not escaped deterioration, but for obvious reasons, except in the immediate vicinity of towns, it has suffered less than any other property; and of course the security of promissory notes issued by country banking-houses, in as far as they depended on landed estates, is, or ought to be, less shook than any other. In the general panic indeed, runs have been made on almost every house of this kind; a few have failed from insufficient stability, and many have stopped payment for want of specie. But in general those who have shewn a sufficient foundation of real property, have been supported by public confidence, and in the absolute scarcity of gold and silver, their notes have returned into circulation. In situations where this has happened,

the distress is far less than where no circulation of such promissory notes had taken place. It seems the more necessary to state these facts, because in both houses of parliament, some respectable individuals seem disposed to impute our present distresses in a great measure to the increase of banking-houses issuing promissory notes. *

It may be observed that circulating notes of this kind, each representing a guinea, have long been the universal medium throughout Scotland, where the commercial distress though great, is much less than in England; not more than one banking-house there having as yet failed. Five pound notes of the same kind, are in common circulation through several of the northern counties, and in the moment of general panic, were much exclaimed against. But the alarm is subsiding, and confidence returns. † The truth will soon appear, to be that a well-secured and well-regulated medium of this kind is at this instant of essential service where it circulates, and it is very probable that it will be resorted to in situations where it has not yet been adopted. In Lancashire, where the distress both in the commercial and manufacturing interests is perhaps greater than in any part of the kingdom, promissory notes were never issued by any of the banking-houses, and to this I will venture to say, the universal stagnation there is in some degree to be attributed. The necessity of resorting to a paper money generally, which cannot be immediately commuted into specie, would indeed be a proof of extraordinary distress, but it may one day come. There is a situation that a good citizen must brood over in silence, but which the rapid career of our

* The duke of Norfolk is one who has fallen into this mistake.

† See the proceedings at Newcastle, Whitehaven, &c.

adversity does not admit to be long absent from his thoughts, in which it may be the only national remedy against general ruin and confusion.

Though the banking-houses which circulate promissory notes, have not contributed in any considerable degree to our present distress, it must be admitted that it has been aggravated by the imprudence of individuals in over-trading their capitals, and resorting in several instances to the system of drawing and redrawing for supporting their credit. § This however is a disease which has a constant tendency to arise in seasons of great prosperity, and which, though it operates severely on particular places, cannot be considered as entering largely into our national distress. In as far as it has affected us, it gives I presume a colour to the assertion of Mr. Dundas. But will even Mr. Dundas say, that the imprudence of a few individuals has destroyed the whole market of our manufactures, or lowered the funds fifty millions?

To this general representation an objection will perhaps occur, that it explains things too clearly; that events can seldom be traced in this regular way; and that politics do not afford any thing so nearly approaching to demonstration. The reply to this is easy—politics have generally for their object, the conduct of cabinets; and the uncertainty to which they are liable, is chiefly to be imputed to the ignorance and caprice by which cabinets are governed. Hence the difficulty of predicting how they may act, arises from the impossibility of foreseeing with any certainty, their motives of action. But that part of the political œconomy which unfolds the theory of trade and manufactures, approaches to the nature of science, because it has

§ Those who wish to see this clearly and fully explained, may consult the *Wealth of Nations*, last edition.

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the intercourse of commercial men for its object, who are constantly governed by a sense of interest, the most uniform motive of human conduct. To suppose that what respects commerce is equally uncertain with what respects politics, is not to make the proper distinctions; the freaks of the mischievous monkey are indeed wild and capricious, but the actions of the industrious beaver are uniform and exact. * It may also be objected to this explanation of the causes of our distress, that it is founded on principles which apply to former wars as well as to that we are engaged in, while our present calamities are altogether singular and unprecedented. It must be admitted that our distresses are singular in degree, but they are not singular in their nature; in the commencement of all our wars, industry and credit have sustained a similar blow, and it only remains to be shewn why the present shock is so peculiarly severe and tremendous.

That the entrance of war has always injured our commercial prosperity, may be proved from the authentic documents in Mr. Chalmers's "Comparative Estimate"; and those who remember the commencement of the last war, must also recollect the distress which it occasioned. The extraordinary ruin of the present moment, compared with that of 1755 or 1775, is to be traced to the change which this nation, as well as the other nations of Europe has been gradually undergoing, and to the peculiar

* Though this figure is somewhat saucy, yet no enlightened and impartial mind will deny that it is just. Compare the beavers who have raised their mounds in Holland, with the monkeys who administered the old government of France. As to the tygers of the present day, they seem to be under the influence of blind instinct; but the same remark is applicable to the Russian Bear, the German Eagle, and the other birds and beasts of prey.

nature and seat of the existing warfare. At the breaking out of the war in 1755, the debt of Great Britain amounted to seventy two millions; at the present time the debt funded and unfunded is nearly two hundred and fifty millions.—We set out on the present occasion under an additional weight of almost two hundred millions!

But let us take the commencement of the last war, a period still fresh in our recollections, and when the disparity of situation was not so great. In the beginning of February, you held out a prospect that the existing revenue was not likely to fall off in consequence of the present hostilities, because in the first year of the last war, it was not much affected. You seemed to admit that the *progress* of our commerce and manufactures might indeed be stopped, but you did not apprehend there would be much if any diminution, of what we already possessed. The melancholy records of the last three months have detected this fatal error, to which perhaps the war itself is in some degree owing, and painful as is the office, there may yet be some advantage in tracing it to its source. The American war commenced in a gradual manner. Our disputes with the colonists had been of several years continuance, and before hostilities commenced, our merchants had foreseen them and provided against them. The provision, it is true, was far from complete, for though in the year immediately preceding the war, very unusual remittances were made from America, yet on the opening of hostilities, a large capital was locked up in that country, by which the trade of London, Bristol, and Liverpool, was considerably injured, and at Glasgow, and Whitehaven, a very extensive bankruptcy took place. A circumstance however distinguished those times from the present which is of material importance.—Previous to the war of 1775, our manufacturers were

were not much in the habit of exporting on their own accounts. They received their orders chiefly from the merchants, at whose risque the manufactures were shipped, so that though the mercantile houses received a severe blow in the rupture with America, the manufacturing capital was, comparatively speaking, little injured. What contributed a good deal to this, was the prohibition of importation laid by the American Congress the year before the war, at a time when remittances to this country were allowed, and were so considerable. In consequence of this, our manufacturers, with their skill, and their capitals unimpaired, began by times to explore new markets, and to improve those already known; and from this date commenced that rapid increase of Export to the continent of Europe, which saved us from national bankruptcy, and raised us again to our rank among nations. It was soon found that the American market was, comparatively speaking, of little value, and it was found also, that the superiority of our manufactures forced their way into it notwithstanding the obstructions of the war. They took a circuitous course indeed through Holland; but Yorkshire furnished the greater part of the cloathing of the Sans Culottes of America, and though they had set up a republican government, and were rebels, not against Louis XVI. but our own gracious king—no traitorous correspondence bill was moved for by the Attorney General of the day. *

Since

* It was during this period if my memory does not fail me, that the Duke of Richmond, who has been so loyally employed of late in fortifying the tower, was accused in the ministerial papers of having surveyed some parts of the coast, for the purpose of directing the French where they might with safety attack us; it was at this time that Mr. Burke openly boasted in the house of commons, of corresponding with the republican-rebel Franklin, intriguing at Paris to bring all Europe on our heads; it

Since the last peace however our manufacturers have almost universally acted as merchants, and shipped their goods on their own account. They have gained possession of the foreign markets, in part from the superiority of their skill, but far more from the superiority of their capital, which has enabled them to give a credit almost every where from twelve to eighteen months. Hence at the present moment our manufacturing capital, (contrary to what happened in the beginning of the last war) is in a great measure invested in foreign debts. The merchants in the ports of the kingdom felt the calamities of war soonest; but it is on the manufacturing body that it will fall with the most unrelenting ruin. What adds to the distress of the moment, is that the war was not like the American contest long foreseen. We had declared for a peace-system; it was clearly our interest to maintain it; it seemed almost suicide in France to provoke a quarrel; mercantile men in both kingdoms deprecated a rupture, and reasoning on the grounds of mutual interest (the familiar and fundamental principle of plain and sensible men) they could not believe, long after the horizon began to darken, that a storm would ensue.—When the clouds burst, they were therefore naked and unprepared.

The difference in the situation of our public burthens is also to be considered in comparing the two periods; we commenced the war with America under a debt of 130 millions; and we start now with 240 millions: our peace establishment, the interest of the debt included, was then ten millions annually; it has now mounted to seventeen millions.

it was during the same calamitous period that a young statesman, since so well known throughout Europe, began his career by justifying the republicans of America in their resistance, and reprobating as the height of wickedness and insanity, our design of subjugating them by force.

It may however be supposed that our ability to pay these increased burthens, has increased in a proportional degree—I would not undervalue the resources of my country, and I believe this to be true; but it is only true while we continue at peace, and preserve as much as possible, the peace of the world. If indeed our ability to pay taxes were measured by the state of our exports, it might be justly doubted whether it has augmented in the degree that is supposed. § But this ability depends in reality on the excess of our productive labour over our wants; and the facility of collecting taxes, a point very important, depends in a great measure on the degree of consumption and circulation.—The excess of our productive labour does not appear in our exports, as some are apt to suppose, for much of it has been employed in the creation of new capital, in the increase of buildings and machinery—in the improvement of the soil—and in the opening of new roads and canals, of all modes of employing the national capital, by far the most useful. † The improvements were

§ The average of our exports for the last ten years does not, it is said, exceed seventeen millions; which is not more than three millions greater than the amount they averaged in an equal number of years before the American war. The documents on this subject however are not sufficient for accurate statement.

See Mr. Chalmer's Comparative Estimate.

† In Lancashire alone, one million of the profits of manufactures and commerce, is about to be invested in canals now forming there, if the distresses of the times permit the subscriptions to be paid; and such of the labouring manufacturers as are employed at all, are now chiefly employed in forming these canals. The happy effects of such an application of capital in a single county, and such a county as Lancashire, no one can estimate, but they depend almost entirely on peace. The war has already sunk the value of shares in this property greatly, and it has diminished the carriage on the canals already made, more than one half. On this subject authentic information may be obtained from the Duke of Bridgewater. I speak on the authority of a well-informed correspondent.

going

going on with a most happy and accelerated progress; our public burthens were beginning to decrease with the increase of our power of bearing them; and England advanced rapidly towards that ultimate point of prosperity, the possibility of which was demonstrated by Adam Smith with a mathematical precision; and its approach predicted by yourself in a strain of eloquence that gave to truth all the charms of fiction, and unfolded to an admiring nation, a prospect of real happiness, supposed only to exist in the poet's dream! || You know, however, and you acknowledged, that the continuation of peace was necessary to ensure the blessings you foretold—happy had it been for the nation, if you had seen that it was indispensable to the duration of those we already enjoyed!

It has been imagined by many, that the present war ought to be light in comparison of the last, because then we fought alone, and now all the world is in alliance with us. Mr. Dundas in the house of Commons boasted of this; and declared the intention of ministry was to bring if possible every nation of Europe upon France. It is, I presume, in consequence of the operations of this policy before it was avowed, that Spain and Prussia are now in arms, and that Portugal, Turkey, and the northern powers, are openly solicited to join the general confederacy—Weak and miserable policy! Better far had it been for Britain to have fought France singly, if her power had been twice as great, while the rest of Europe looked on, than to stir up and mingle in this general crusade of folly and ruin. I speak not in the language of a moralist but of a politician, and of this bold assertion I challenge the most rigid examination.—What supported us during the American

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war? the export of our manufactures to countries that could purchase them, because they enjoyed the blessings of peace. But who is there now to buy our manufactures; where is peace now to be found? The nations of Europe are in arms from the white sea to the pillars of Hercules, and in the course of the summer there will be upwards of two millions of men in the field. Ancient or modern history states nothing equal to the expence of the extent of this armament, undertaken when the funds of all the belligerent powers are anticipated and exhausted, and national credit is every where (England I hope excepted) about to explode. If the whole population of Europe be a hundred and twenty millions, it will contain twenty-five or thirty millions of men fit for labour, or what are called fighting men. Of this number there is a 12th or 15th part taken from productive labour to that which produces nothing; or, what illustrates the point more clearly, brought into the same situation as to the public, as if the whole became paralytic in a day, and yet required not only the same subsistence as when capable of labour, but one much more expensive. But as the men called into the field, are in the flower of life, the productive labour diminished will be more than in proportion to their numbers, and as they are to combat far from home, the expence of their maintenance as soldiers will double and treble what mere cessation from labour would have produced. The stock of productive labour left, must however not only be subject to all former burthens, but oppressed with the maintenance of the labourers taken from it and turned into soldiers, and thus the loss will be more than doubled. It is possible that in some parts of Europe famine may arise, but this is not likely to be a general or an immediate effect. Subsistence is such an evident want and such an irresistible call, that the ground will always be cultivated in the first instance.

instance. The labourers taken from agriculture for the field, will have their places supplied by others deprived of their usual labour in manufactures, which the war has injured or ruined; and poverty, by teaching men less expensive habits both of diet and clothing, will protract the hour of absolute want. It is in the seat of war only that famine may be considered as inevitable; it is there also that disease may soon be expected; contagion will scatter her poison, and destroy more than the sword. The elasticity of human exertions cannot be exactly calculated; and it would be rash to predict, how, or to what extent these may operate under burthens so heavy and so general. It seems however unavoidable, that during the continuance of the war these burthens must every where increase. If even the support of life became difficult, the collection of revenue will become impossible: from the shrivelled muscles and dried bones of their starving peasantry, the conquerors of Poland, and the invaders of France will not be able to extract the support of their senseless ambition and foolish waste.

It is evident that this general poverty must operate peculiarly, and every day more heavily, on Britain. Since the last war this country has become the store-house of the nations of Europe, and has furnished almost the whole stock of the superfluities they have been enabled to buy. We see clearly that it is the consumption of these superfluities the war must destroy, in the first instance; experience has rendered this truth incontestible. Those who live by the manufacture of these superfluities, must therefore be the first and greatest sufferers in every part of Europe, and unfortunately the greater part of this description of men live here. Here then the ruin must be most severely felt, and our sufferings will be the greater and the harder to bear, because they will be in the exact proportion of our former *prosperity.*

prosperity. It is very clear then, that had we even ourselves continued at peace, while the other belligerent powers were at war, we should have suffered much from the progress of universal poverty. There are however advantages attending such a situation, which, with prudent management, might have borne us through the difficulties. We should have supplied the clothing of the various armies in the field, we should have enjoyed a monopoly of the sale of arms, artillery, and the other means of destruction; we should have become the universal carriers of provisions and warlike stores, we should have been enabled to convey our own manufactures in safety wherever any sale for them remained; and we should have been saved the enormous and destructive expence of arming and protecting our extended commerce in the different quarters of the globe. Our possessions in the east and in the west would have remained secure, and the credit of our paper circulation continued unimpaired. While the storm raged on the land, England might have declared the ocean inviolable, and if the warring powers had disturbed it, she might have reared her head above the waves, extended her immortal trident, and bid the brawlers cease. § Holding in her possession a great part of the clothing, the arms, and the stores of the powers at war, and the undisputed mistress of the sea, the great channel of intercourse between nations—when the strength and fury of conflicting passions was sated with blood or subdued with slaughter, she might have denounced her vengeance on the aggressors, have offered her succours to the oppressed, and dictated the terms of universal peace.

§ Maturate fugam, regique hæc dicite vestro :
Non illi imperium pelagi, sævumque tridentem ;
Sed mihi forte datum——

VIRGIL. ÆN. I.

Such

Such our situation might have been—nay, must have been, had we not have become parties in the general strife. What is our situation now? We are involved ourselves in the quarrel; there is no nation of Europe left to mediate between the conflicting powers; and if England does not again assume the office of umpire, nothing but the extermination of the French, or the downfall of the government of Germany, seems capable of satisfying the enraged parties, or restoring the peace of the world. But it may be said, it is better for us to fight France now, with all the world with us, than to fight her by and bye alone. Why should we fight her at all?—it is not our interest. But it may be supposed that the ambition of France when her government is settled, will compel us to go to war in self-defence. I do not think this likely, because it cannot be *her* interest, but we will allow the supposition. If France attacks us, it must be on the sea, our favourite element, and there she will I doubt not, find our superiority once more.—There she found our superiority in the American contest, though she employed her whole resources on her marine, though she was aided by Spain, Holland, and America, and though she attacked us when we were in some degree exhausted by three expensive and bloody campaigns.

If France and England combat alone, it must be on the sea, and destructive though the contest must be, it is not likely of itself either to endanger our constitution or destroy our credit, as some have weakly supposed. Our constitution is enthroned in the hearts of Englishmen; and will never be destroyed by foreign force; our credit depends on our commerce, but more especially on our manufactures, which we know by experience can survive a rupture with France, and even increase during its continu-

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ance, *provided the rest of Europe is at peace.* § Unfortunately at present all Europe is not only engaged in war, but in a war of unexampled desperation and expence, at a time when public debts and taxes have accumulated to an enormous degree in almost every one of the belligerent powers; where the governments of course (that of our own country always excepted) are universally oppressive, and the people poor and wretched.

Fifty years ago, Mr. Hume treating on the effects of public credit, observed, that it must either destroy the nation, or the nation must destroy it. "I must confess," says this profound observer, "when I see princes and states quarrelling, amidst their debts, funds, and public mortgages, it always brings to my mind a match of cudgel-playing fought in a china shop †." Since the time this was written, the public debts of the European nations have been more than doubled, taking the whole together, and those of France, Britain, and Russia, have increased almost fourfold. The figure of Mr. Hume may now perhaps be a little altered. The present match of cudgel-playing is indeed in a china-shop, but the walls of the house are now become china also. If the performers get very warm in the business, they may therefore not only destroy the moveables, but bring the house itself about their ears.

§ I would not however be understood to consider a war with France, or with any other country, in any other light under our circumstances, than as that of a most serious calamity. I wish to point out the peculiarity in the present war, that makes it to us particularly destructive. It is the general state of warfare, and the consequent poverty that is our bane. In regard to some of the powers now under arms, if they are to be at war, it is of little consequence to us, as to the actual force they can bring forward, whether the fight with or against us.

† Essay on Public Credit.

I heard

I heard a member in the house of commons pleading with great eloquence for our plunging into the war with France, and call out—Perish our commerce, if it must perish, but let our constitution live!—The words were foolish:—the separation is no longer possible. The vital principle of our constitution—the division and distribution of its powers; may indeed survive the ruin of commerce; and provided the whole people be enlightened, it may be perpetuated after the wreck of our power. The spirit of our religion may be preserved after the decay of our riches, and poverty and sorrow may even render it more pure. The equal principle of our laws now contained and exemplified in five hundred volumes in folio, may appear perhaps as beautiful, when the destruction of property shall have rendered 499 volumes of statutes obsolete, and a single volume comprizes all that our poverty demands. But the blessings of our constitution in the eye of those who administer, or hope to administer its powers, depend, I apprehend, on our opulence, and must perish with the commerce from which that opulence flows. Let those therefore who wish for *things as they are*, beware of the consequences of war. Let all true patriots who abhor civil convulsions, cherish the arts of peace.

Perish our commerce—foolish words! What affords three millions annually to the poor? A million and a half annually to the church? What supplies a million to the civil list?—Our commerce. What supports the expence of our immense naval and military establishments? All our places and pensions?—What but our commerce. Thirteen millions of our taxes depend on circulation and consumption, and this thoughtless senator cries out—Perish our commerce, let our constitution live. But how then must the necessary
E splendour,

splendour, the patronage, and the far more extensive influence of the crown be supported; and if this splendour, patronage, and influence are swept away—Where is our constitution? What shall maintain the crown against a band of factious nobles cajoling the people with the sound of liberty to cover their selfish ambition; * or what shall defend hereditary honours and property of every kind against the great mass of the nation, now become poor, and therefore desperate; ravenous perhaps, from their wants, and terrible from the remainder of spirit and pride which has descended from better times? §

Our constitution, and our commerce have grown up together; their connexion was not at first a necessary one perhaps, but events have rendered it such; the peace and the safety of England depend in its being preserved. Our very habits and manners, and the structure of society among us, are founded on this union. I know the evils of our situation, but the heavy load of our debts and taxes must teach us to submit. Patience, peace, œconomy, and gradual reformation, are the remedies that wise men would point out; the chance of more dangerous means being resorted to, arises from the folly of one class who deny these evils, and by denying aggravate them; and from the folly of another who pronounce them intolerable, and would listen to the councils of enthusiasts or knaves. At present, never was a nation more submissive, or more loyal; but a wise minister will not wantonly try our patience, or goad us too far.

Perish our commerce!—Let the member for Norwich correct his expression. We will excuse

* Old Whigs.

§ The author can throw out hints only at present; but in favour of the prerogative of the crown, as things are situated, he has much to offer.

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the inaccuracy of an ardent and eloquent mind ; we will even make allowance for the prejudices of education—in the school of Mr. Burke, trade and manufactures are words that sound meanly : among the Jesuits of St. Omers, the words themselves were perhaps unknown. Early education, natural taste, and peculiar sublimity of imagination, have made, I presume, the detail and the exactness of commerce, disgusting to Mr. Burke ; and have furnished his mind with those grand and obscure ideas, that associate with the lofty manners of chivalry, and the Gothic gloom of a darker age. Hence probably, (since time, by extinguishing ambition, has restored the original habits of his mind) we are to explain his strong preference of the feudal relicts of our constitution, and his dread of the progress of commerce, as leading to innovation and change. I do not wish to break a lance with the champion of aristocracy, or with any of his disciples ; and I would concede in their favour as much as truth will admit. If our society were to be cast anew, if the interests of our country were alone to be consulted, and the means were entirely at our command—much as commerce is to be valued, it would be wiser and better to give it less share in our prosperity, and at all events to render our revenue independent of foreign trade. How far it might be desirable to control its effects on our manners, and on our habits of thinking, is a question that I cannot enter on at present. Consulting our taste, and setting moral considerations aside, we should perhaps be willing to preserve a greater degree of correctness and purity of manners, and more of the nice and high-spirited sense of honour than commerce generally admits. But if we try different characters by the test of utility, and found this test on the actual state of the nation, the Knight of Chivalry and his various offspring, compared to the

modern manufacturer or the merchant, seem weak and useless things. Even the country gentleman of England, the most respectable character of all those *lilies of the valley who neither toil nor spin*, sinks in this comparison. The proprietor of landed property who lives on the income of his estates, can in general be considered only as the conduit that conveys the wealth of one generation to another. He is a necessary link in society indeed, but his place can at all times be easily supplied: in this point of view the poor peasant who cultivates his estate is of more importance than him. How then shall we estimate him when compared with a respectable manufacturer—with the original genius for instance who has found means to convert our clay into porcelain, and lays all Europe under contribution to England by his genius, taste, and skill. Or what rank will he take when his exertions are put in competition with the power and enterprize of the merchant, whose ships visit the most remote shores and nations; to whom the coasts of Asia, and America, are familiar; who draws his wealth from the wilds of Nootka or Labrador, and who makes even the distant Pacific yield up its stores. Even in his more elevated situation in the house of commons, the country gentleman must not be compared as an object of national importance, with this character. Mr. Windham himself, if placed in the scale against him, would kick the beam, eloquent and virtuous though he be.

To the considerations which I have offered on the importance of commerce and manufactures, and on the effects already produced on them by the war, you, Sir, if you were more in the habit of explaining ministerial conduct, might perhaps reply—that the war is a war of necessity—that it is likely to be short and successful—and that, at all events, the dignity of the nation (the phrase used in the
American

American war) or perhaps of the crown (for this is now the more correct expression of Lord Grenville) is concerned in carrying it on. On each of these points I mean to offer a few observations; I will then endeavour to shew the state the nation is likely to be in on the recess of parliament; I will make some observations on the terrible responsibility that ministers assume, and conclude with one or two remarks addressed more particularly to yourself.

The war was necessary as its supporters say, and this necessity is explained in different ways.—By a few it is asserted that the French were determined to quarrel with us, and that they declared war against us at a time that it was unexpected and unprovoked. This language however is held by very few, and is indeed so utterly inconsistent both with fact and probability, that nothing but ignorance or dissingenuousness can employ it. The French were fighting, or thought they were fighting, for their national existence, against a combination of the most alarming kind;—to what purpose should they add England to the number of their enemies?—England whose power they knew by fatal experience—whose irresistible force on the ocean they had repeatedly sunk under; and whose neutrality seemed almost essential to their procuring the means of carrying on the war. If it be asserted that they hoped to excite commotions among us, peace seemed necessary to this scheme; for during peace only could they carry on the intercourse which such a plan would require. Idle threats of internal commotions were indeed thrown out by some individuals among them, but men only could be sincere in their expectations that open war would *directly* promote these, who were before insane. It may however be said, that insanity did in reality pervade their councils, or those at least by whom their councils

councils were influenced; and indeed this supposition seems in a great measure founded on truth. But the reply to this is clear: how far soever their insanity might go, it did not extend to a war with England, a calamity not only deprecated by their rulers, but by the whole body of the people. There is not an individual who has been in France since the revolution, who will not confirm this truth. † The manner in which this fierce nation humbled itself to England in negociation, was indeed very remarkable; and though in a moment of wounded pride, the actual declaration of war came from them, yet they soon repented of their conduct, and are now openly renewing their endeavours, one might almost say their solicitations, for peace. § Peace and war, Mr. Pitt, were in your choice—they are in your choice now; you made your election of the latter—you adhere to it—to the late application of Le Brun, it is said, you have not even vouchsafed an answer.

It might seem indeed from the whole of your conduct towards France for a twelvemonth past, that England had a particular interest in the continuance of war; or if she is supposed to be too proud to be governed by her sense of interest, that her honour was concerned in the keeping up of hos-

† The National Assembly had probably been deceived respecting the sentiments of the people of this country, but previous to the war, they had discovered their error. The decree of the 19th November might perhaps be somewhat influenced by their notion of the existence of a republican spirit here, and in this respect the addresses from different bodies of Englishmen, did great mischief. But the effects of the proclamation had shewn the real temper of the nation in a clear and indisputable light, and this was well understood in France when they were negotiating for peace.

§ See the letters of M. Le Brun to Lord Grenville, Star, 22d May.

tilities,

tilities, or her passions gratified by the continuance of destruction.

It is well known that the treaty of Pillnitz was the source of all the present hostilities; and it might have been foreseen that an attempt to carry it into effect would produce a great part of the calamities which have ensued. At the time that this took place, the constitution of France was settled; the king and the people had sworn to obey it. There was in it a good deal to praise, and much to blame, but for reasons which it would be useless to detail, it was on the whole impracticable. The men of talents and influence in France had however seen their error in weakening the executive power too much; they were rallying round the throne; and the army, headed by the purest and most popular character in the nation, were acquiring every day, more and more, military habits and virtues. The constitution, with all its faults, had produced the most sensible advantages to the labouring part of the people; § it contained within itself the means of correcting both its principles and practice; and there was perhaps a chance that these might have been remedied without a civil war. It is however far more probable that a civil war must have ensued; but if the parties had been left to themselves, there is no one will deny that Fayette and his friends, in possession of all the constitutional authorities, would in all human probability have been victorious, and the ill-fated monarch have preserved his life and his crown. In the mean time the rest of Europe might have rested in peace—the constitution modelled perhaps on our own, would have assumed a more practicable and consistent form, and liberty been established on law.

§ See the Tour of Mr. Arthur Young.

The danger to which the final triumph of the new constitution was exposed, arose from a foreign war. If the neighbouring nations should attempt an invasion of France for the avowed purpose of restoring its ancient government, from that instant it was evident that the constitution and the king himself were in extreme hazard. By the constitution, the whole means of the nation's defence against this invasion, must be trusted in the hands of the king himself, to replace whom in unlimited power, the invasion was made. Among a people intoxicated with liberty, and jealous in the extreme, it was impossible that any wisdom could in such circumstances secure an already suspected monarch from the imputation of treachery. As the danger from this treachery became greater, the passions of the people arose; when the Duke of Brunswick entered France, they burst into an open insurrection, and through a scene of dreadful slaughter, the constitution was overturned and the monarch dethroned. This crisis was foreseen by the Jacobins, and by every means provoked; it was foreseen by the Feuillans (the true friends of liberty and of limited monarchy) and earnestly deprecated. The virtuous monarch himself was sensible of his danger, and in his extreme distress applied to England to avert it. It was evident that the Emperor would not venture on this invasion without the aid of our ally the king of Prussia, who had no more pretence for attacking France, than for his invasion of Poland, in which such flagrant wickedness and such detestable hypocrisy have been openly displayed. The unhappy Louis intreated our interference to detach the king of Prussia from his design, in language the most pressing and most pathetic. Such an opportunity of exerting great power on a most sublime occasion, and to the noblest of purposes, is not likely to recur in a single age, and is reserved by providence for
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its choicest favourites. Such an opportunity was presented to you, and you weakly and blindly cast it away.

The language which you put into your sovereign's mouth on that occasion is on record.—Professing every good wish for the king of France, he could not interfere without he was requested by all the parties concerned; that is, not only by him in distress, but by those also whose conduct occasioned the danger; The conspirators at Pillnitz, and the Jacobins of Paris, equally triumphed on this occasion.—The constitution and liberties of France, were the objects of their common attack.—At the same instant foreign war and internal insurrection fell with all their furies on the friends of the king, of law, and order; the streets and the prisons of Paris overflowed with their blood; and those who escaped the daggers of the Jacobins were seized on the frontiers by our ally of Prussia, loaded with chains, and sent to the dungeon of Magdeburgh to perish in silence, or suffer in hopeless captivity worse than death can inflict. Gratified in the destruction of their common enemy, the votaries of superstition and of enthusiasm have met in dreadful conflict; a war of unexampled fury has ensued; and after the sacrifice of a hundred thousand lives, the flower of the youth of France and Germany, the hostile armies are precisely in the same situation, as when the carnage began!

Another opportunity had in the mean time offered for England to interfere, and to restore the peace of Europe.—Winter produced a temporary suspension of hostilities. It is well known that Prussia, baffled and worn out, wished, during this armistice, to make its peace with France, and that Spain was about to settle its differences with her also. Austria left alone was unequal to the contest, and by our mediation peace might have been

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restored.

restored.—Difficulties had indeed occurred : France had not only repelled her invaders, but had in her turn become the aggressor, and Flanders had been over-run by the arms of the victorious republic. The possession of Flanders by France might not only weaken Austria too much, (I use the language of politicians) but expose Holland to be invaded and over-run. France must therefore be induced to renounce Brabant. In the mean time there were new difficulties in the way of negotiating with France from the change which had taken place in its government. Those who had hardly been able to see with patience the representative of the constitutional king, could not be expected to receive with kindness the delegate of the new republic. If however we treated at all, it must be with these who held the reins of government, men, it must be acknowledged, against whom the feelings of almost every heart in England revolted. A minister is, however, to consult his reason, not his feelings, and to listen only to the interests of his country. If these require peace, his duty is to procure it by every fair and reasonable means ; and if he treats at all, to treat with temper, even though his opponents are *robbers in their cave*. If war, on the other hand is inevitable, his business is evident—to refuse all negotiation, and to let loose the whole force of the state. You took a middle course : the dangers of war could not be altogether overlooked. You would treat therefore but under a delicate distinction, which was to appear to our allies, as if we did not treat at all ; and as it should seem, to secure your honour, you set out in the business with *refusing the right of your antagonists to hold a treaty*. Le Brun and his associates however submitted ; it is known that they were ready to have renounced Brabant, rather than go to war with England ; and universal peace was perhaps
once

once more in your power. By this time, however, the nation was inflamed to a great degree by the apprehension of internal conspiracies, and the dreadful anathemas of Mr. Burke in the House of Commons had destroyed all temper and moderation. From Mr. Fox the mention of peace with France, had been received almost with execration, and England was pervaded with the spirit of the ancient crusades. In this situation every moment became more critical—you hesitated—negociation was one day begun and the next abandoned—standing on the brink of a precipice, you dallied with the temper of two inflamed nations, and were pushed forwards into this bloody war. If you did not act as a great statesman on this occasion, some apology may be found for you—your temper was perhaps irritated; your sense of honour and your feelings of sympathy outraged; and though the minister cannot be pardoned, the man may stand excused. Deeply as I lament the war and its consequences, I must fairly admit, that the madness of the moment renders it doubtful, whether it could have been avoided during the last days of negociation, by any measures in your power. Indecision is certainly not a part of your character in seasons of difficulty or danger; but on this occasion it seems fairly to be imputed to you; and to this it was owing that the *alarmists* had taken the nation out of your hands.

Without imputing bad motives to those who stood forward to propagate the rumours of internal sedition and conspiracy on that occasion, it may now, I think, be said pretty confidently, that their fears greatly magnified the real danger. Why they were terrified, and why their terrors were in a great measure vain, may be easily understood by any one acquainted with human nature, who looks at all the events of that period with an impartial eye. The retreat of the Duke of Brunswick, the battle of Je-

mappe, and the conquest of Flanders, came so rapidly and so unexpectedly upon us, that men who had blindly wished, and weakly predicted, the immediate subjugation of France to the Prussian arms, were seized with a sudden terror proportioned to their foolish hopes. France marching with giant strides over her frontier, seemed to threaten the world. Those who in the first instance had not taken into their calculation the force of enthusiasm acting on a great and powerful nation in a moment of external invasion, could not, it may reasonably be supposed, form any just opinion of its nature or extent; and saw in their frightened imaginations, not only the downfall of the despotic governments of Europe, but the overthrow of our own happy constitution, the source of so many blessings and the well-earned purchase of more than one revolution, and of many years of civil war. On the other hand, the surprising success of the French, raised to a high pitch of elevation all those who, from whatever motives, had interested themselves in their favour; and the classic grace with which the spear of liberty was wielded at Jemappe, threw a momentary veil over former proceedings, too foul to bear the light. In this situation of things it was impossible that parties feeling so differently, should not be mutually offensive to each other, and that those who triumphed for the moment should not become objects of apprehension to those already so dreadfully alarmed.

During this state of jealous fear, strong confirmations could not be wanting, for "trifles light as air" would have served the purpose; and it is well known, that even the very looks of the supposed republicans, were stated in the house of commons as proofs of their seditious views. It must however be acknowledged, that there was great folly and indiscretion, to say no worse, in the conduct

duct of many of the *new Whigs*; § and that the addresses to the National Assembly from societies in England, however they might be intended, were capable of producing no good, and pregnant with the most serious evils. Whether any thing resembling a plot really existed, cannot perhaps be as yet ascertained. Floating notions of change probably pervaded the imaginations, and occasionally escaped the lips of enthusiasts, but it does not appear at all likely that any plan for this purpose was concerted or even meditated in any quarter. And the notion so industriously circulated, that there was among us a large body of men, some of them of the first talents, leagued in a conspiracy against their country with the Jacobin party of France, is one of those wild and foolish things, of which in a few months, those who credited it will be ashamed, and which will soon be remembered only for the mischief it has done.

It is to this general suspicion that the war itself is in a great measure to be attributed. One part of the cabinet, as report says, was warmly and decidedly for it from the first, and the eagerness of the *Alarmists* in the house of commons in favour of this bloody measure is well known. A step so fatal to the general interests of the country would not, however, have been taken in the face of even a feeble opposition out of doors. Three public meetings—at Manchester, Wakefield, and Norwich, prevented the Russian war. But where was opposition now to come from? Every man that objected to a measure of ministers, was by this time supposed to be an enemy to the constitution; and he

§ This description of men has not yet got a name that both they and their opponents admit—Patriots and Jacobins are the party designations—I chuse a middle term, and quote for this appellation the authority of Mr. Burke.

who opposed a war with France, was openly cried down as a secret ally of the Jacobins, and as only anxious to save them from the force of our irresistible arm. Professions of attachment to our own happy constitution, were regarded as of no value, unless they were accompanied with a blind and unlimited confidence in administration; and he only was considered as a true friend to his country, who was ready to put all our blessings at hazard, by rushing madly forward into this foolish crusade.

The whole body that associated with Mr. Reeves seemed to think the support of the war necessary to the support of the constitution; and in the house of commons Mr. Burke, with the peculiar frenzy that distinguishes all his conduct, reiterated the war-hoop of *atheism*, and pronounced Mr. Fox's proposal of attempting to avert hostilities by negotiation, as a step that would lead by necessary consequence to our virtuous Monarch's suffering the fate of Louis XVI. §

It is a consequence of the system you have adopted, I presume, that though, as it has appeared

§ The manner in which this strange man has introduced his sovereign into debate at different times is truly curious. His conduct in this respect during the regency, when he represented the Almighty as *having hurled him from his throne*, and at the time now alluded to, when in the excess of his loyalty, he expressed his fears of *his being beheaded*, are apparently much contrasted, but evidently flow from the same structure of mind. A man that could talk openly in the House of Commons of the "king's head being cut off," is not however, I apprehend, likely to be appointed a lord of the bed chamber, or even a gentleman usher. Mr. Burke, it is said, is a poet, and that is true. But there seems about him a frenzy that is more than poetical—an habitual disposition to exaggeration that trespasses the bounds, not of truth only but of nature; and an irascibility that has no resemblance to any thing to be seen in rational life, and that impresses upon us the notion of a *mind diseased*! In this view of the subject Mr. Burke is perhaps an object of pity. When his fits are not upon him, he is known to be gentle and humane.

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since, you were yourself actually negotiating at this time, you preserved a cautious silence, and suffered the nation to believe you thought with Mr. Burke. For the first time in his life Englishmen were in sympathy with this extraordinary character, and madness became more contagious than the plague.

If it were at all proper to argue with men who can believe that the only means of securing the reverence of the nation for the constitution, is to plunge us into all the horrors and miseries of a foreign war, I would point out the consequences that may possibly result from the rebound of general sentiment; from the union of starving ignorance, with desperate ambition; and from the progress of poverty, misery, and discontent. But I do not think it necessary at present to insist on such topics; because blindly and foolishly as such men have acted on their own principles, I believe the season of delusion is passing, and that Englishmen will be able to distinguish, under every event, the substantial excellence of our constitution; and attribute their sufferings, whatever they may be, to their own delusion, and the madness of those who have misled the public mind.

But it may be said that the war is likely to be short and successful, and is therefore now to be persisted in, however indiscreetly it may have been begun.

The answer to this is not difficult—the war has had already all the success that we could hope for. It brought on the invasion of Holland, and that invasion is repelled: it has obliged the French to abandon Flanders—to do that by force, which they were before inclined to do by negotiation: it has covered the sea with our ships of war, and made the merchantmen both of France and England disappear—and finally, after several hard fought battles, it has enabled the king of Prussia to lay siege to Mentz, and the prince of Cobourg to sit down
before

before Valenciennes.—But what is really of importance, it has brought from the French new offers of peace.

What then may be the cause why we so proudly and sullenly (as it is said) reject them?

It may be said that we wish to carry on the war till we obtain a barrier against the future irruption of the French into Holland or Brabant, and that this being effected, we mean with our allies to rest on our arms, and leave the nation to settle its own government. If this be our policy, it were far better to rest now.

The probability of obtaining and of preserving peace depends, in a great measure, on the terms which are offered according with natural principles of equity. That every nation should keep within its own confines, and chuse its own government without molesting its neighbours, is a proposition which is agreeable to our common apprehensions of justice; and applied fairly and equally to the powers at war, it may produce a speedy and lasting peace. But to insist as a ground work of such a treaty, that the Austrians shall obtain and keep possession of those strong fortresses on the northern frontier, by which France is defended, is to purpose that which is equally offensive to the pride, and alarming to the fears of Frechmen, and which is likely to occasion a vast and a fruitless effusion of human blood. Shall we consent that France shall be dismembered? Shall we abandon our countrymen of Lisle and Valenciennes to the despots of Germany? If we give up a part of our territory, what security shall we have that the dividers of Poland will rest contented with a part, especially when by possessing our strong holds they may invade us at pleasure, and march at once into the heart of our defenceless country? Such are the questions that will be asked, and it must be acknowledged that they are founded on
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natural feelings and reasonable fears: before these are subdued, many a brave man will strew the field. But if indeed the security of the low countries, be our only object, why not fortify Namur, Mons, Tournay, &c. which the Emperor Joseph dismantled, under an idea (which illustrates very strongly the folly of looking far into futurity) that the marriage of his sister with the unfortunate Louis, would render a barrier needless on the side of France? If those fortifications which were thought sufficient against Louis XIV. are not sufficient against the proud republicans, why not erect others? And if bankrupt Austria cannot do this, let us (if we must mingle in their affairs) be taxed to support them, provided only it is for an expenditure that will terminate in peace.

The real interest of foreign nations is not whether France shall have a constitution of this or that form; it is that they shall have a regular government of some form or other, which may secure the faith of treaties, and due subordination to law; and this is the interest of the people of France themselves more than any other. Why then, it may be said, do they not follow their interest? Because they do not perceive it. And they are prevented from perceiving it by the pressure of external war.

Revolutions of government call forth great talents and virtues, but they also too frequently call forth great crimes. Where all the usual ordinances of law and society are broken down, men will rise indeed in some degree according to their activity and talents, but in a degree also according as these talents are exerted without scruple or restraint. In the enthusiastic state of mind by which revolutions are accompanied, great crimes make little impression on the *million*, provided they are exercised in the spirit of party, and under the appearance of patriotism.

patriotism. Compassion, charity, candour, and even a sense of justice, are too generally swept away in the whirlwind of passion and prejudice, and lie buried under the wreck of virtuous habits and principles, to revive in quieter times. In such a state of things the natural influence of integrity and property, as well as the artificial distinctions of rank and birth give way to the governing power of enthusiasm, and men often rise to direction and command from the lowest stations, by the force of strong talents, and bold tempers, and by the buoyancy of heated imaginations.

Enthusiasm is in seasons of danger felt by virtuous as well as by unprincipled minds; by the former indeed perhaps more than the latter; but in virtuous minds, while it expands all the generous feelings, it does not destroy the restraints of principle or honour, even towards antagonists or enemies, and much less towards those embarked in the same cause.

Revolutions however in their progress, stir up society more and more, even to the very dregs, and bring forward more and more of ignorance and profligacy, (terms which in political life are nearly convertible) into the general mass of feeling and of action, in which the national will and the national force reside. Men who wish to guide this will, and direct this force, in times of popular commotion, must partake of its character, and vary their conduct with the rapid changes which the general sentiment undergoes. But in every great revolution this sentiment has a tendency to become gradually worse, and the character of those at the helm must become worse also. In the course of this melancholy progress therefore, men of real principle and pure honour, who cannot bend to the opinions of the day, are probably thrown off, or perhaps destroyed, and are succeeded by other descriptions,
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each in succession more unlike the first, till at last perhaps the unprincipled and desperate obtain undisputed sway.

Hence in our own country, the resistance to Charles I. which was led by Hampden and Faulkland, terminated in Cromwell and Lambert; and hence the revolution of France, originating with Fayette, Necker, and Mirabeau, has descended into the hands of Danton and Robertspierre. §
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§ The American revolution may be instanced as an exception to this general representation, but improperly. We must first observe (as was noticed by Mr. Fox in his debate on Mr. Grey's motion) that in America, though there was a change of the governing power, there was no revolution of habits or opinions: no sudden change of principles. It must be observed also, that the Americans had much less of poverty and ignorance among them (though less knowledge no doubt) than what is to be found in England and France. And thirdly, it must be observed, that something of the same kind did actually take place in America, as in England and France, though certainly in a less degree. Round the American Revolution, as well as the American character, a false glare has been thrown by the splendour of their success. The congress did not, like the national assembly, expose their debates and dissensions to their own people, much less to all Europe; but it is well known that party prevailed in it in a considerable degree, and Washington himself, if report speaks truth, was at one time preserved in his command by a single vote only. In the course of the revolution many bloody deeds were acted, that ought not now to be revived. But the following quotation from the history of the American revolution by Dr. Ramsay, himself a member of the congress, will shew how the morals of the people were affected, and bear testimony to the author's candour and love of truth. "Time and industry have already, in a great degree, repaired the losses of property, which the citizens sustained during the war, but both have hitherto failed in effacing the taint which was then communicated to their principles, nor can its total ablution be expected till a new generation arises, unpractised in the iniquities of their fathers." If indeed Dr. Ramsay had not acknowledged this, the conduct of the assemblies which were elected immediately after the revolution, would sufficiently prove it. By these assemblies, standing on a popular basis, (especially by what

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The influence however of men who openly violate the first obligations, as well as the most palpable interests of society, is exposed to continual danger from the very scaffolding on which it is raised, and cannot survive that heated and enthusiastic state of mind which extinguishes for a time, and for a time only, the feelings of compassion and the sense of justice.

Enthusiasm is, from its very violence, of short continuance: it produces the most cruel desolations in society: but, as Mr. Hume has profoundly observed, “its fury is like that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before.” The accounts that we receive of the French shew clearly, that they are at present a nation of Enthusiasts: of this their very crimes give the most decided evidence. Their contempt of danger and hardships; their utter disregard of self-interest, and of all the motives which influence men in tranquil life; their frantic schemes; their wild suspicions; their implacability towards their enemies; their proneness to murder;—these are the true and exact features of enthusiasm, operating on minds previously degraded by a superstition the most vile, and by a slavery the most abject. §

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of South Carolina) acts were passed dissolving the obligations of justice, in a way as arbitrary, and nearly as open as the most despotic monarch whatever. An experience of the evils resulting from such outrages, has reformed both the principles and the practice of the American politicians; and men of honour and integrity, many of them beat down by the revolution, have recovered their proper influence in quieter times. Over and above all the circumstances I have mentioned, the natural phlegm of the American character, compared with the vehemence and impetuosity of the French, was an advantage not to be calculated.

§ In Dr. Moore's Journal, various proofs of the truth of this may be found.—A Sans Culotte presenting to the national assembly

The more fiercely this national disease rages, the more certainly will it terminate speedily, providing it be left to itself. Society cannot possibly subsist under the present system in France, and the excesses of the Jacobins must sooner or later produce their destruction. The nation, waking from its delirium, will see the horror of its situation, and fly for a refuge from anarchy to the constitution it has rejected, or some better regulated form of government; or perhaps to the very despotism it has overthrown. But if continued attacks are made from without, this issue will certainly be prolonged, and may perhaps be prevented till the despotic governments now in arms, every day becoming more poor, and therefore more oppressive, shall be themselves brought to the ground!

The great instrument of the success of the Jacobins has been the suspicion they have constantly excited, that every friend of peace and subordination was connected with the foreign enemies that are invading France. § A high-spirited nation will not receive the purest of blessings on compulsion, and would reject the British constitution itself, though it were absolutely perfect, if presented on the bayonet's point. But what boon do the conquerors of Poland hold out to them? What blessings do the people of Germany offer to their view? Absolute subjugation

fembly on the 10th of August the head of a murdered Swiss, and at the same time emptying out of his hat the jewels and gold which he had found in the Thuilleries, is a striking picture of the species of disease of mind under which the nation labours.

§ The strength of such an instrument as this, may be judged of by the success with which it was employed by the *Alarmists* here. The friends of peace in this country were in the same manner denounced as leagued with foreign invaders, and this was the real secret of Messrs. Reeves, Burke, and Co. for *levelling the levellers*, at the success of which, considering the men, many people have been so much surprized. The nation was panic-struck, and apprehension and credulity go hand in hand.

to a foreign force is the favour and the mercy of the rulers; ignorance and submission to unlimited oppression is the example of the armed slaves whom they command. It is no wonder that a nation of enthusiasts should be inflamed to madness on the approach of such invaders, and spurning the dictates of wisdom and of reason, should consider those who would restrain them as leagued with their enemies, and commit themselves to such only as are as frantic as themselves. Hence every attempt to restore order to France has been frustrated by foreign invasion: Clermont-Tonnerre and Rochfoulcauld have been murdered, and Narbonne, Fayette, and Liancourt have fled. And hence also, it is but too likely, that the siege of Valenciennes and Condé will prove the ruin of the brave and perhaps honest insurgents on the banks of the Loire. How certain the overthrow of the Jacobin system in France would be if the nation were left to itself, may be gathered, not only from the nature of that system, but from the attempts to overturn it in the very face of a foreign invasion; and how very unlikely the allies are to succeed in their endeavours to give a constitution to France by force, (the only rational object for which war can be continued) may be collected, not only from the history of the past, and from what has been already mentioned, but from other considerations.

Under the pressure of external invasion, almost any government will hold a nation together, and every form of republican government, however unfit for quieter seasons, is at such times productive of great energy of mind, and therefore of great national force. The cause of this is to be traced to the peculiar consequence which a republican government gives to the individual, by which his country becomes of consequence to him, and the whole strength of his private and public affections in a moment of external invasion bears on a single object—the national defence. The truth

truth of this might be amply illustrated from the history of the republics of Greece and Rome ; where may be seen also what appears so very extraordinary in modern times, the most unbounded licentiousness and confusion in the centre of the government, joined with the most formidable power on the frontiers. §

In times of peace the existence of primary assemblies such as are universal in France, seems incompatible with the safety of established government, but in a situation like the present, these will be the nurseries of courage, of eloquence, of daring minds ; by giving every individual an active and personal interest in the state, they will strengthen its defence in an extraordinary manner. The division of France into districts and departments, establishes within it so many rival republics, and in this way will probably produce that high-spirited emulation between neighbouring communities, so dangerous to internal quiet, but to which Greece, when invaded, owed its safety in the classic ages, and perhaps Switzerland its independence in modern times.

In the progress of revolutions it is material to observe, that talents do not seem to suffer an equal degradation with principles. On the contrary, situations of continued difficulty and danger have a tendency to call forth talents (in as far as these are distinct from virtue) more and more ; and to strengthen and expand them when found. In long

§ In this respect, as well as in several others, France recalls to our minds the states of antiquity. There are indeed circumstances of resemblance in their situation that might afford room for much curious observation, and the hesitation we entertain in applying the experience we derive from Greece or Rome to modern France, is perhaps chiefly founded on a doubt, which at times has appeared reasonable enough—Whether these countries have continued beings of the same species—Whether these French be indeed men, or some other description of animals.

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established monarchies, such as are spread over the continent of Europe, rank has the chief or indeed the sole influence in bestowing command, and nature in bestowing talents pays no attention to rank. But in revolutions, artificial distinctions being overturned, the order of nature is in some degree restored, and talents rise to their proper level. Hence it is that revolutions once set on foot, have the weight of talents generally in their favour. It may be objected however, that when the sword is once drawn, the issue depends on military discipline and skill, and that these will always be found, on the side of experience. Daily observation however proves that the mere mechanism of a soldier is easily and speedily learnt, and the uniform voice of history tells us, that the qualities of a great general, are in an especial manner the work of nature; what superior genius seems to acquire the soonest, and what all other men find it impossible to acquire at all. Hence though in the beginning of wars, discipline and established rank have usually the advantage, in the course of them nature and genius always preponderate. §

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§ The whole of these observations might be illustrated from our own civil wars. Detestable as Cromwell and his associates were in many respects, they must be allowed to have possessed very superior talents both in the cabinet and the field. In the beginning of the war military experience was entirely with the king, but what is curious, there did not arise one good commander on his side, the gallant Montrose excepted, and he, it may be observed, was educated among the covenanters. On the other side arose Essex, Fairfax, Cromwell, Ireton, Lambert, and Monk. Most of these had no previous acquaintance with military affairs. Cromwell, the first captain of the age, was forty-three years old before he became a soldier. These curious circumstances have not escaped Mr. Hume, nor the explanation of them. Reflecting on this subject, I have sometimes amused myself with supposing what sort of military commanders our political leaders would make, and I apprehend they would arrange themselves pretty

The application of these observations to the affairs of France is so obvious, that it would be superfluous as well as tedious to point it out.

The impossibility of conquering opinions by the sword, and the dreadful slaughter which the attempt when persisted in must necessarily occasion, may be learnt from the revolution in the low countries, and the bloody transactions of Ava there. If the great mass of the people have imbibed opinions, extermination only can root them out. Hence the *fundamentality* of the French revolution, so much exclaimed against by the weak and fearful; and so much dreaded even by the enlightened, though it will probably be the source of long internal dissensions, renders it invulnerable by foreign attack. Mr. Hume has remarked the universal and extreme reluctance with which men abandon power once possessed, and you, Mr. Pitt, can probably speak to this truth from your own feelings.—Well then, Sir, the Sans Culottes have recovered what they call their rights, and may be said to be men in power—power newly tasted, after long and hard oppression. Whether this power be good for them or not is another thing—they think it good and that is enough. Once they have obtained quiet possession of it they will probably abuse it, as other men in power have done before them. But while it is attempted to be wrested from them by armed force, it will rise every moment in their estimation, and death only will be able to rob them of the golden prize. The revolution of Poland, on the other hand, was not a *fundamental* revolution; and it was praised by Mr. Burke, (a suspicious circumstance) on this account. The truth is, it was a change of the form of government,

pretty much according to their present order—Mr. Pitt himself would form a very great general.—First-rate talents are of universal application.

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and a partial enlargement of its basis, from which however nine tenths of the people of Poland were entirely shut out. When the king and the nobles therefore abandoned it, the peasantry abandoned it also, and found no motive for risking their lives in defence of blessings they had not been permitted to taste. This is the real cause of the rapid success of the confederate arms, and not the open plains and dismantled fortresses of the country, as some have supposed. The true defence of a nation in such circumstances—the only defence that is impregnable, lies in the poor man's heart.—That abandoned, the rest is easy.—

Princes and lords may flourish or may fade,
A breath can make them as a breath has made,
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd can never be supplied.

GOLDSMITH.

In viewing this subject, so many considerations rush on the mind to shew the folly of the present invasion of France, that I am compelled to dwell on general topics only; otherwise I might expatiate on the utter incapacity of the Austrian army to keep the field at all without supplies from this country, and the impossibility of our finding such supplies. Abject as the temper of the nation appears, it will not, I apprehend, submit to utter ruin, and I pronounce coolly what I have considered deeply, that nothing but utter ruin can be the consequence of our persisting in this copartnery with the folly and bankruptcy of the continental powers. It is not enough that we pay with English guineas, extracted from the labour of our oppressed peasantry, the people of Hesse and Hanover, to fight German battles. We must support the armies of Austria also, and from the wreck of our ruined manufactures, supply them with food, clothing, and arms. But what consummates

mates our misfortunes is, that if by our assistance the confederates should succeed in their views, England will be blotted out of the system of Europe; Holland cannot preserve her independence a single day; a connected chain of despotism will extend over the fairest portion of the Earth, and the lamp of liberty that has blazed so brightly in our "Seagirt Isle," amidst the northern waves, must itself be extinguished in the universal night. §

The mischief that is meditated, is of a magnitude that seems more than mortal, but happily the execution of it requires more than mortal force. The ignorant and innocent slaves that are the instruments on this occasion are men—they must be clothed and fed—they have men to contend with, and are liable to the death they are sent to inflict—they may perish by the sword, by fatigue, by famine, and by disease. The new Alarics that employ them are men also, weak, ignorant and mortal like the rest. Death will soon level them with the instruments of their guilty ambition. In a few years, or perhaps a few months, Catharine will sleep with Joseph, with Leopold, *with Peter III.* New characters less tinctured with prejudice, will receive a portion of the spirit of the age, the systems of despotism be broken, and mortality come in aid of reason and truth.

In the mean time it is possible that Condé and Valenciennes will be taken, and that the hostile armies may march into France as before. If pursued into their own country, Frenchmen will, in all probability, continue united, and they will carry on the war, when compared to their assailants, at little ex-

§ I purposely avoid enlarging on this view of the subject, because I think nothing so unlikely as the conquest of France. It has been discussed in the Morning Chronicle by a writer under the signature of "A Calm Observer," with a perspicuity and force of reasoning that nothing can surpass. The whole series of letters far exceed any similar production of the English press.

pense. The men are on the spot ; their provisions are behind them ; muskets are in their hands ; enthusiasm in their hearts. The more they are pushed on their centre, the more will their force and courage increase. The invaders will probably be again compelled to retreat, and their retreat will neither be easy nor certain : the victorious republicans will pursue them, and again perhaps disdaining the restraints of prudence, push their conquests to the banks of the Rhine. A single action lost, a single action recovered Flanders, and Flanders and Holland will now feel the same bow.* What shall save Holland if Flanders fall ? The Coldstream you see are mortal men. Even the three princes of the blood-royal of England will not appal the fierce republicans—*What care these roarers for the name of King ?* § If the danger I state seem at a distance, let it not on that account be disregarded. Every step the allied armies advance into France the danger seems to me to approach ; and were they within ten leagues of Paris, I should tremble the more for the fate of Amsterdam.

The opportunity of restoring general peace presented itself at the time of the congress of Antwerp. Dumourier had retreated ; Flanders was recovered. We had nothing to do, but to declare, what must I think be declared in the end, that *if France will confine herself within her own territory, she may there shape out her own constitution at her will.* Had this been done at the time mentioned, Dumourier, not rendered odious by foreign alliance, would in all probability have been able to restore the constitutional monarchy, and in every event, France occupied by intestine divisions, would, as it seems probable, have left Europe in quiet for many years to come. This policy was so clear that a mere child might have discerned it ; it did not even require a negocia-

tion with the French cabinet, and while it secured our best interests, it left our honour also without a stain.

How then shall we account for the resolves of the congress of Antwerp. We must unveil the truth. The members of this congress were German princes, or their agents ; even the representative of England there *was a German prince*.—Such men from their education are in general ignorant, and labour under prejudices from their situation, of a destructive kind.

Military despots in their own dominions, they feel it their personal interest, perhaps (such may be the force of prejudice) they think it the interest of mankind that despotism should be universal. To such men the anarchy of France under Jacobin rulers, is not half so alarming as the constitution to which this may give birth. They are aware that the crimes acting there at present are sufficient to render the French name detestable among their subjects, but if these crimes should open the eyes of the French themselves—if out of the mingled wrecks of despotism and anarchy, a limited monarchy should arise in France, as it did in England, or any other form of a free constitution that secures subordination to law—then it is that the French example will become far more destructive to arbitrary governments than their arms, and the crowned heads of Germany, great and small, will have real cause to tremble. It is true, if they were enlightened they need not tremble at all ; they would see that arbitrary power is as destructive to him that possesses, as to him that endures it. But it cannot be expected that they should discern this—the errors of education blind all but very superior minds ; and though Germany produces more princes than all Europe besides, it is not once in
a century

a century that she produces a prince that is a truly great man. §

Mr. Fox contends that government is *from* the people; Mr. Windham that it is only *for* the people. These philological distinctions are not attended to by the rulers of Germany, among whom even the word *people* is not to be found. Their *subjects* they know are accustomed to obedience; the blessings that flow from liberty and property they have never experienced, and they are therefore fit instruments in the hands of arbitrary power. Germany it is well known is inhabited chiefly by princes, nobles, musicians, and peasantry; merchants, manufacturers, and country gentlemen, the leading descriptions of Englishmen, are there almost wholly unknown. The three first of these classes are, during war, in their natural element, and the last who sustain all the evils and all the burthens, are as yet too abject and too ignorant to make their sufferings dangerous to those by whom they are oppressed. A perseverance in the war will indeed destroy what little trade and manufactures there are in Germany, and render their governments, (that of Hanover excepted, whose military expenses are defrayed by England) universally bankrupt. The creditors of the states will be ruined, but the expenses of the courts and armies will not perhaps on that account be less. The ordinary revenue of a German prince, depends chiefly on the

§ Frederick the second was a wonderful man, and it has amused many persons to suppose how he might have acted on the present occasion. This however seems pretty certain that he would not have lain eight months in the neighbourhood of Mentz before he found an opportunity of laying siege to it. The present conduct of the Prussians conveys an eulogium on the talents of that great monarch, beyond the power of Hertzberg's oratory. As however, they considered themselves sacrificed before, their present backwardness may arise as much from spleen as from any other cause.

products

products of the soil, and dreadful must be the oppression before these fail. The peasantry will be taxed more and more to support increasing burthens, and the extortion of such taxes will rivet the poverty and ignorance through which alone these burthens are endured. It is thus that the tyranny of the rulers and the degradation of the people must keep equal pace; it is thus that despotism forms a natural alliance with ignorance; blasts every charm of rational nature, and blunts every feeling of the human heart. There is indeed a point at which the oppression of the most abject, becomes no longer safe—a point which, if I mistake not, the despotic governments of Europe are fast approaching. They have undertaken to subdue the enemies of kingly government in France, and are staking their whole credit on the issue of an undertaking from which, according to every human appearance, they will return baffled and disgraced. The most despotic governments depend for their existence on opinion as well as the most free. If the concert of princes should be baffled, the prejudices of their subjects will be shaken, and the moment this happens, the foundation of their thrones will be rendered insecure.

Behold then once more, a crisis which has so often occurred in history; which has presented so frequent and so awful a warning to rulers, and has presented it so often in vain. A government bankrupt by its own waste and folly; sensible of its insecurity, and therefore jealous, irritable, and oppressive. A people already labouring under almost intolerable burthens, and doomed to suffer others more heavy still—casting off with its prejudices, the habitual submission and respect to its rulers, and imbibing those immutable truths which are so dangerous to oppressors, and sometimes indeed so fatal to those who are oppressed. Every day the
breach

breach widens—the sword at length is drawn and the scabbard cast away.—In the dreadful conflict which follows there is only one alternative; the government must be overturned, or the people reduced to the condition of beasts. We cannot have forgotten the causes which produced the revolutions of Switzerland, Holland, and England—which have so recently produced the revolution of France; and which are again conspiring to shake all Europe to its centre, and to form a new æra in human affairs.

What dreadful insanity is it which involves the fate of Englishmen in this impending ruin—which embarks our commerce, our manufactures, our revenue, perhaps our constitution itself, the source of all our blessings, in this desperate crusade of despotism and superstition against anarchy and enthusiasm; in the course of which, however it terminate, we can reap nothing but misfortune; and in the issue of which we may learn, that no human institution can withstand the folly of those who administer its powers.

Men of Switzerland how I respect you! While the hurricane of human passions sweeps over France, Italy, and Germany, elevated on your lofty mountains, you are above the region of the storm. Secure in your native sense, your sincere patriotism, your simple governments, your invincible valour, your eternal hills—you can look down on the follies and the crimes which desolate Europe with calmness and with pity, and anticipate the happy æra when perhaps you may mediate universal peace. Sea-girt Britain might have enjoyed this situation, had she known how to estimate her blessings, and kept aloof from the madness of the day.

At this moment the session of parliament closes;—a dead stillness prevails over England, the natural consequence of astonishment at the spreading destruction,

destruction, and of strong passions violently suppressed. The Opposition, deserted by all those *feeble amateurs*, whose minds have not sufficient comprehension to discern the true interest of their country, or whose nerves are too weak to bear up against vulgar prejudice, has endeavoured, but in vain, to discover the extent of our continental engagements, or the real objects of the war. § Two hundred and eighty members ranging behind you, support every measure you propose, and among the whole number, not a man has been found to inquire of you openly in the name, and in behalf of the people of England, how long their patience is to endure, and how far the progress of ruin is to extend.

You have assumed on this awful occasion the whole responsibility of public measures, and your character and reputation, I fear you mistakingly conceive, are wholly committed on the successful issue of the war. Your real friends must sincerely lament this on your own account; the friends of their country will lament it on account of the general calamities it is likely to produce. The nation, Mr. Pitt, has loved you “well—not wisely,” and it is partly in consequence of this, that at the present moment her real interests are opposed to the personal honour of him she has trusted and idolized. In this day of distress she is told to repose in the constitutional responsibility of ministers. “Be still, ye inhabitants of the isle, thou whom the merchants of Zidon that pass over the sea have replenished.”—ISAIAH. Alas! what will silence do? Will the responsibility of ministers restore her ruined trade, feed her starving manufacturers? will it replace the husband and father to the widow

§ Security and compensation are words that may be explained at pleasure.

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or

or the orphan, or restore to the aged parent his gallant son? Will it recall to life the brave men now mouldering in unhallowed earth in Flanders, joint-tenants of a common grave with those against whom they fought? †

If I were bold enough to appreciate your political life, Mr. Pitt, I should be inclined to allow the outlet of it extraordinary merit. The sentiment of approbation that attended you was indeed almost universal—you were the hope of the good, the pride of the wise, the idol of your country. If your official career had terminated with the discussions on the Regency, though one of the most fatal of your mistakes had been committed before this, it may be questioned whether modern Europe could have produced a politician or an orator more strenuous, more exalted, more authoritative; § one whose ambition was apparently more free from selfishness; who afforded to his opponents less room for censure, or gave to his friends more frequent occasions of generous triumph and honest applause. —The errors that you have fallen into are natural for men long possessed of power uncontrolled, and in imputing them to you, I accuse you only of the weaknesses of human nature. It is not necessary to a free people to have rulers exempt from such weaknesses; but it is necessary for them to watch and to guard against these infirmities.

It is natural I believe for successful ambition, to seek new objects on which it may exert itself. Hence after you had subdued opposition in England, you issued forth like another Hercules in quest of new adventures; and traversed the continent of Europe to seek monsters whom you might

† This affecting circumstance is, I am told, literally true.

§ See Mr. Grattan's character of Lord Chatham, printed at Dr. Robertson's.

subdue. You could not however but be sensible, that the reputation of a minister of trade and finance, which you had justly obtained, was incompatible with that of a great war minister in the present state of the nation. You took therefore a middle line; you made preparations for fighting on every occasion, but you took care not to strike. England might perhaps bear the expense of arming, but could not actually go to war, and this secret which your three successive armaments discovered to all Europe, led Mirabeau on his death-bed to give you the name of *ministre preparatif*.

In men long in possession of power, a secret sympathy (unknown perhaps to themselves) is gradually strengthening in favour of others in the same situation, and a secret prejudice, amounting perhaps at last to enmity, against opposition to power in every form. Hence the danger you saw to England in the triumph of the patriots of Holland over the Prince of Orange, and the safety we acquired from the subjugation of the Dutch by the Prussian arms.—Hence also the perfect composure with which you expected the conquest of France by the despots of Germany, and the sudden alarm with which you were seized, on the repulsion of that invasion, and the overrunning of Flanders by the republican arms. By the freedom of Brabant, the constitution of England might be endangered, but it became the more secure in your eye, it should seem, by the extension of despotism over every corner of Europe, and the success of foreign bayonets in rooting out *liberty* as well as licentiousness in France.

It is also to the unhappy prejudices of your situation that I attribute your want of moderation of temper on occasions of the utmost moment; your allying your great talents with the weak judgments and the passions of those around you; and your blindness (if such it be) to the real dangers of this

commercial nation, and to the path of safety and of true honour, which it was no less your duty than your interest to pursue.

In contemplating events of such magnitude as those connected with the French revolution, the utmost calmness, as well as comprehension of mind is required:—and more particularly required in him who directs a nation's affairs. Unhappily these qualities are seldom found in any station; and this revolution seen in part only, has become the object of wild encomium, or of bitter reprobation, as the prejudices of men have been affected, or their sympathies engaged. The most prudent part perhaps for one whose political situation is influenced by his opinions, is to be silent on the subject. It is uncertain how this extraordinary event may terminate, and its ultimate effects on the human race cannot yet be ascertained. At present however it is well known, that not in England only, but in every part of Europe, the dreadful excesses in Paris and elsewhere, have turned the tide of popular sentiment and opinion strongly against the French. Even under the most despotic governments, the people at present hug their chains, and tyranny itself is secure. Can it then be supposed, that in England, there is any serious danger from the contagion of French principles; in England where the constitution is so substantially good, and the people so loyal and united? The theological and sectarian prejudices of different and opposite kinds through which the affairs of France have been viewed, have indeed contributed most fatally to bewilder the understanding, and to inflame the prejudices of Englishmen; and to these is to be imputed in a great degree, that most singular delusion—that the safety of our constitution has depended on our risking all our blessings in this most fruitless, expensive, and bloody war. That delusion (for such I consider

der it) is now I hope nearly over, and peace, which is the general interest, will soon, I doubt not, be the universal wish. Every consideration calls loudly for it, and it may be much more easily obtained now, when our enemies are humbled, and the people of England are still patient and silent, than at a future period, when the invading armies may be checked or repulsed, and the nation is become openly impatient under the expense and ruin of the war. A man of your sagacity will easily discern, that in times like the present, the gale of popular opinion is constantly shifting the point whence it blows, and will see that it cannot be trusted to carry you forward in your present career, in the face of great and increasing obstacles.

In considering the aspect of the present times, I am sometimes affected with deep melancholy ; yet I am not one of those who despair of the fortunes of the human race. Through the thick clouds and darkness that surround us I discern the workings of an over-ruling Mind. Superstition I know is the natural offspring of ignorance, and governs in the dark ages with a giant's strength.—Unassisted reason is a feeble enemy : opposed to superstition, reason, in days of ignorance, is a dwarf. In the order of providence enthusiasm arises to resist superstition ; to combat a monster with a monster's force. What did Erasmus in the days of Luther ? What would Louth have done in the days of Wycliffe, or Blair in those of Knox ? In the councils of heaven, mean and even wicked instruments are often employed for the highest purposes. The authors of the reformation were many of them ignorant, fierce, and even bloody, but the work itself was of the most important and most universal benefit to the human race. The *despotism* of priests then received its death-wound, and the *despotism* of princes has now perhaps sustained a similar blow.—Pure religion has survived

survived and improved after the first; the true science of government may improve after the last, and be built every where on the solid foundations of utility and law. Before such happy consequences ensue, dreadful commotions may indeed be expected over Europe, commotions which England, and perhaps England only, may, if she is wise, escape. The present generation will probably be swept away before the intellectual earthquake subsides, but those who succeed them, will, I trust, find the air more pure and balmy, and the skies more bright and serene. If these expectations should be thought delusive, they are yet pleasing, and I rest with humble confidence in this most consoling truth, that in every event, the ways of God will be justified to man.

J. W.

